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ABSTRACT

The guidelines discuss ways to organize effective Community Advisory Committees (CACs) as required by California special education legislation. The CAC, it is explained, is composed of parents, handicapped pupils or adults, professionals, and interested citizens. Six functions are outlined, and potential effects on the district and the parent/child are listed. Suggestions for organizing the CAC touch on recruitment, selection of officers, development of goals, and planning of meetings. Roles of facilitators, recorders, group members, and managers/chairpersons are examined. Tips on effective communication (including media relations) are included. The guidelines conclude with a list of resource staff (members of the Special Education Resource Network) and several suggested activities for getting acquainted and beginning discussion. (CL)

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VOLUME I

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guidelines

EC 151668

SPECIAL EDUCATION RESOURCE NETWORK
THE CALIFORNIA STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT UNIT

GUIDELINES

COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

GUIDELINES

Funded by:

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Developed for the

SPECIAL EDUCATION RESOURCE NETWORK

By

Ruth Wharton Brown

Resource Service Center
Special Education Resource Network

Steve Johnson, Director

10/82

OVERVIEW

This notebook contains information developed specifically for use by Special Education Resource Network staffs, Community Advisory Committee chairpersons and others providing leadership and assistance to districts and Local Planning Agencies in the organization of effective Community Advisory Committees.

Many of the implementors of the California Master Plan for Special Education have encountered similar experiences and invested much time and effort in establishing a functional CAC which would facilitate the organization process for CAC's. The guide is not designed as a step-by-step process but as a resource, based on input from chairpersons of CAC's throughout the State of California.

It is imperative that Community Advisory Committees be viewed as a part of the team in the provision of services to handicapped students, although they serve in an advisory capacity. Inherent in all the mandates and intents of the California Master Plan for Special Education is the underlying theme of "a team approach." The Community Advisory Committee provides the necessary forum for realization of the team concept for parents, schools and communities.

Ruth Wharton Brown

Ruth Wharton Brown
Program Development Specialist
SERN/Resource Service Center

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction

With the creation of California's Master Plan for Special Education and PL 94-142, and subsequent legislation, parents of individuals with exceptional needs can now enjoy the same educational guarantees and opportunities for their children as "normal" children have had in years past.

Here is a resource which should aid Community Advisory Committees in effectively working in concert with educational institutions and the community to insure the best education possible for all students. While the educational and social goals for our special-needs students are for total integration, it must be remembered that in order for this to be successfully accomplished, understandable and realistic objectives are a must.

As parents and educators of students with special needs, our prime concern should be to facilitate every student's achievement of his or her highest potential and capability. The CAC plays a vital role in this effort. As the community advisory group, the CAC can help the district program to remain "on target" while recognizing that the educational program must be directed by teachers, administrators and local Boards of Education. With the team approach the coalition of all of these segments shall produce a high quality educational program.

As an original Master Plan implementor for special education in California, the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District CAC was uniquely comprised of not only parents of special-needs students but also parents of "regular" students from each school. In that way the total school community became involved and knowledgeable about the program and, more importantly, the goals and objectives of the California Master Plan for Special Education. Again, the key to success will be understanding. As the CAC you will be the key to that success.

Good luck in your endeavors --- the parents and children thank you!

Ilona Katz

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CAC ROLE AND FUNCTION

LEGISLATIVE JUSTIFICATION

Education Code (Article 7, sections 56190 - 56194) --- describes the role and responsibilities of the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) that is appointed by and functions in an advisory capacity to the governing board of the Local Planning Agency.

Some important points covered in Article 7:

The Community Advisory Committee (CAC) shall be composed of:

- Parents of individuals with exceptional needs enrolled in public or private schools
- Parents of other pupils enrolled in school
- Handicapped pupils or adults
- Regular education teachers
- Special education teachers
- Other school personnel
- Representatives of other public and private agencies
- and Persons concerned about individuals with exceptional needs (56192)

(56193) At least the majority of the CAC must be composed of parents with children enrolled in schools participating in the local plan and a majority of such parents must be parents of individuals with exceptional needs.

(56194) The Community Advisory Committee shall fulfill the responsibilities defined for it in the local plan. Such responsibilities shall include--but are not limited to all of the following:

a. Advising the policy and administrative entity of the district, Local Planning Agency, or county office regarding the development and review of the local plan. Such entity shall review and consider comments from the Community Advisory Committee.

b. Recommending annual priorities to be addressed by the plan.

c. Assisting in parent education and in recruiting parents and other volunteers who may contribute to the implementation of the plan.

d. Encouraging community involvement in the development and review of the local plan.

e. Supporting activities on behalf of individuals with exceptional needs.

The list of responsibilities of Community Advisory Committees requires the CAC to continue functioning after approving the Local Planning Agency's plan for special education services. The tasks of this committee are many and varied. The CAC needs to develop a yearly plan of activities. Such a plan may easily be generated from brainstorming sessions as well as through contacts with other existing CAC organizations and soliciting suggestions from the local administrators and staff. A list of suggestions is included in the following pages.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Arrange for presentations and speakers on topics of current interest, i.e.,

   a. Transition of handicapped students from elementary to junior high

   b. Adolescent development (social and physical/ academic) strengths and weaknesses

   c. Differential standards - graduation requirements

   d. World of work--careers for the handicapped

   e. Child management techniques

   f. Community services for the handicapped

   g. Current legislation and ramifications

2. Annual parent seminars/conferences

3. Film festivals--request information on appropriate films from local SERN unit.

4. Cooperate with the district in conducting a review of district programs in special education

5. Assemble booths or displays at "Back to School Night"

6. Work with school librarians to host book fairs highlighting books for, about or written by handicapped persons.

7. Develop a one year work or activity plan for publication in district newsletters and in the local newspaper

8. Develop member notebooks containing all information regarding CAC and district organization--line and staff charts

9. Contact local media and community organizations which could give CAC high visibility

10. Conduct fund raisers for special projects

11. Appear as guest speakers on local public tv/radio talk shows

12. Solicit active involvement and support of PTA or PTO

13. Recruit active involvement on Title I Advisory Committee and/or School Improvement Program

14. Support active involvement in local and national organizations

15. Serve on Community College Advisory Committees for services to handicapped persons

16. Develop a "Community Information Tree" for distribution to public and private agencies

FUNCTION OF CAC

Information included on the following pages is written for the express purpose of bringing into focus the long and short range benefits to everyone involved in the role and function of the CAC. Parents, students and school staff all reap equal benefits when working together toward a common goal. The content included here may be used in a number of ways but is included specifically as information presenting benefits achieved when the CAC is effectively implemented.

Content from these columns may be placed on separate transparencies for use as discussion items in recruiting new members and supporting active involvement of existing members.

FUNCTION:

Work to improve coordination between all community and district efforts, making use of the many services available; publicize to increase awareness.

EFFECTS ON DISTRICT:

Educated and informed parents are great assets to a program.

EFFECTS ON PARENT/CHILD:

Increases services to child and communication among parents, teachers and other community service providers.

FUNCTION:

Assist the parent in coordinating the child's school program with other community programs. This may or may not be included in the IEP.

-7-

EFFECTS ON DISTRICT:

With a child whose needs are being totally met, the teacher has a more productive student. Provides for a more successful educational program.

EFFECTS ON PARENT/CHILD:

Provides the parent with a total support system. Home and school can work together towards success.

FUNCTION:

Be available to serve as a parent liaison in an IEP Team at parent's request. Involvement prior to the actual meeting is imperative to be fully informed and able to clarify positions for the parent.

EFFECTS ON DISTRICT:

May prevent repetitive meetings or an unnecessary due process hearing. Greater chance of reaching a decision which is satisfactory to all.

EFFECT ON PARENT/CHILD:

Provides parents with a clear understanding of meeting, giving them an opportunity to competently weigh all information. The child does not become a pawn.

FUNCTION:

Act as a parent ombudsman to lend an understanding ear to any parent who may be troubled regarding the child. Provide them appropriate direction and follow through.

EFFECT ON DISTRICT:

District personnel gain a better informed parent and will thereby be able to make better decisions with the parents regarding the child.

EFFECT ON PARENT/CHILD:

Creates an open communication line for parents and students. The special education student will be better prepared to lead a more normal life. He/she will discover greater acceptance.

FUNCTION:

Build a cooperative relationship between regular and special education. This includes administrators, teachers, parents, and students. Setting up workshops, conferences, etc., with the many groups such as PTA and the School Site Council will serve as one way to accomplish this.

EFFECT ON DISTRICT:

Improve teaching conditions for all teachers thus creating a better atmosphere for learning.

EFFECT ON PARENT/CHILD:

Removes special education from the closet. Creates an open communication line for parents and students. The special education student will be better prepared to lead a more normal life. He/she will discover greater acceptance.

FUNCTION:

Educate the community about the problems facing our older youth in special education, and facilitate the interaction of existing programs as possible solutions, i.e., drug and alcohol abuse, community colleges, Department of Rehabilitation.

EFFECT ON DISTRICT:

Improve the teaching atmosphere. Improve academic performance. Provide consistent services after graduation.

EFFECT ON PARENT/CHILD:

Improve home atmosphere. Increase probability of child becoming successful in the community.

ORGANIZING

Organizing the Committee

ORGANIZING THE COMMITTEE

By
Fern Heeger
CAC Chairperson
Los Angeles Unified School District

FIRST THINGS FIRST

The first step in the organization of a Community Advisory Committee is the selection of a core of energetic and effective people. These are the people who are willing to give the time and energy necessary to build a strong foundation for the organization. In recruiting these people, use the following guidelines to create the atmosphere necessary for an effective team of parents and professionals.

1. Enlist the aid of district administrators in identifying parents who have been actively involved in the schools.
2. Contact active leaders representative of other community agencies.
3. Seek out teachers who have been instrumental in forming parent groups.
4. Contact the medical profession for representation.
5. Contact professional organizations for recommendations of parents and teachers.

This list of suggestions for recruitment of membership is not meant to be all inclusive but simply as a springboard. Another point to consider is the selection of a group of individuals who will work well together and possess a positive mental attitude as well as a willingness to work as a team with the local administration.

In addition to effective recruitment of members, some orientation and training should be provided for committee members. Most committee members first come to meetings seeking ways to enhance programs and services for their children. As chairperson of the CAC, your task is to lead committee members in discovering that through working to improve programs for all children, their goals are easily achieved.

An effective advisory committee member SHOULD have the following knowledge and mental attitudes. As you look over the list, think about the members in your group and of ways in which your group as a whole can grow:

1. A detailed knowledge of the local agency--programs, personnel, general policies, relationships among the staff and with other governing groups (superintendent, county office, etc.).
2. Good communication skills are essential. Each individual will have his or her own style, but the basics of courtesy, the willingness to listen to the other side of a situation, and the ability to present a clear picture of your impressions can be developed or enhanced for ease of communication.

3. As a group, you should strive to set reasonable, attainable goals for the year or term of service. Goal setting, as an activity, is not limited to the IEP process. Workable goals insure continued interest among your membership.

4. To function effectively in your advisory capacity, your group should work toward positive suggestions and solutions which are not self-indulgent to even a majority of the membership.

5. In order to find out more about possible areas in which you may assist the local agency, develop a questioning attitude which brings out problem situations but does not put anyone "on the spot."

6. Remember that the toughest problems are those which deal with people in stress, and that reasonable solutions may not be perfect nor universally accepted.

7. Meeting dynamics and control are vital to interesting and effective meetings. Agendas, goals, time-limited task forces, etc., all play a major role in making your meetings ones that people will want to attend on a routine basis.

8. In order to continue to grow and serve, your committee must be always looking for new people to broaden the base of interests represented.

9. In order to keep abreast of changes in the legislation and regulations concerning Special Education, some review process should be set up. If not on an on-going basis, at least on an annual review.

10. If Special Education is to have a public-relations spokesperson, who is the more likely candidate than an advisory committee member? An on-going supportive campaign can do wonders when the chips are down and decisions have to be made in resource allocation. Parents are the strength of this education legislation!

11. As a part of all of the above is the responsibility the advisory committee has in general parent education. Your committee may represent only a small fraction of the parents of children served by your local agency. It's your job to get your own act "together" and then to help every other parent in the area that can benefit from your knowledge!

RECRUITING MEMBERS

In recruiting new members, look for a wide variety of representation. Although the more active parents may have children in programs for the severely involved child, representation is needed from all programs. The Master Plan is written for all children with exceptional needs.

Contact other parent groups, advisory committees, teachers, and principals. Included in Vol.II is a sample "Council or Committee Application" from one CAC. This volume of resources may be borrowed from your regional SERN center. You may want to use a similar format to start with as a guideline. Avoid passing over someone who has a tremendous amount to offer the group simply because that person does not represent an appropriate area.

The original members may find it beneficial to develop a newsletter for distribution to all parents in the district to acquaint them with the CAC. Using the newsletter as a springboard, have interested parents initiate a contact with the CAC or arrange an informal meeting to recruit new members. Sample forms and newsletters from other CAC's may be obtained on request from your regional SERN unit.

If there is an overabundance of agency personnel represented in membership, you may suggest that they serve on a rotating basis so they each serve for a given number of months.

SECOND THINGS SECOND

Every organization needs leadership and structure in the form of officers, by-laws, goal statements, etc. Appointment of temporary officers could take place within the small group as well as development of a draft of the by-laws and selection of a nominating committee. Consideration should be given to election of the following officers and committee chairpersons:

Officers:

1. President or Chairperson (or Co-Chairpersons)
2. Vice President or Vice Chairperson
3. Secretary - Recording - Corresponding
4. Treasurer

Committee Chairperson or Co-Chairpersons

1. Legislation Committee
2. Membership Committee
3. Goals Committee
4. Publicity Committee
5. Program Committee
6. Others as necessary.

I. Chairperson or President:

A. The chairperson must be able to work well with administrative staff and members.

B. The chairperson must be able to effectively run a meeting, being able to communicate well and delegate responsibilities.

C. The chairperson is a standing member of all subcommittees and ad hoc committees.

D. The chairperson will be responsible for an agenda and organizing meetings.

II. Vice Chairperson:

A. The vice chairperson will be responsible for all chairperson activities in the event that the chairperson is unavailable.

B. The vice chairperson could be chairperson of the membership committee.

C. The vice chairperson will assume the position of chairperson in the event that the chairperson leaves the committee.

III. Secretary, Recording & Corresponding:

A. The secretary is responsible for meeting minutes, agendas, notification to members of meetings.

B. The secretary should always have a notebook containing all correspondence, minutes, agendas and other information pertinent to the CAC.

IV. Treasurer:

The treasurer is responsible for accurate recording of any expenditures, i.e., postage, printing, etc.

V. General Members:

General members will serve on various committees.

KEEP THE BALL ROLLING

The membership remains active if the CAC:

I. Defines roles so as to keep members actively involved.

II. Assures that all tasks undertaken are meaningful and have specific purposes outlined.

III. Enlists commitments from members.

IV. Doesn't allow the full burden to fall on just a few members.

V. Assumes the role of partner or team member in working with the Special Education Local Planning Agency (SELPA).

VI. Meetings are effectively planned.

VII. Meetings are held at a regularly scheduled location with adequate advance notice.

VIII. Allows time for public input before or after adjournment of meetings.

The major points in the following pages (16-26) are excerpted from How to Make Meetings Work by Michael Doyle and David Straus, 1976, Playboy Press, Chicago, IL. Copyright permission has been secured.

GOALS

A goal statement is a written commitment by an organization to a set of goals which the group will work to achieve.

The committee should have both long-range and short-range goals. A brainstorming session during your first working meeting will bring them out. A goals committee should prepare a formal statement of the goals agreed upon during the brainstorming session. At a subsequent meeting, the goals should be formally adopted.

Aim high in long-range goals. Adopt goals that will fulfill the needs of handicapped children in the community. Be more specific in short-range goals, selecting goals that can be reached in a year or two through determined effort.

BYLAWS

Bylaws are rules an organization agrees to live by. Development of bylaws promotes smooth and efficient functioning of the committee. Bylaws are particularly necessary if there is any dissension within a group.

Most organizations have the same basic rules, hence their bylaws are essentially the same. Keep them short, simple, and to the point. Examples may be obtained from your local SERN office (included in Vol. II CAC Resources).

CONSIDER EACH OF THE FOLLOWING POINTS AS YOU PLAN YOUR MEETING:

1. Objectives and expectations of the meeting.
2. What type of meeting is it?
3. The composition of the group: who should attend?
4. What kind of involvement and participation do you want?
5. How many people do you expect to attend?
6. Where: Room arrangement and size of room.
7. Roles and responsibilities for people during the meeting.
8. Who will have the power and authority?
9. What methods and techniques of discussion, planning, problem solving should be utilized?
10. How much time to allow?
11. Will there be an agenda?
12. Will there be presentations?
13. Will there be some kind of minutes?
14. What are the desired outcomes of the meeting?
15. How to determine tasks, deadlines, and responsibilities.

TIPS ON PLANNING MEETINGS

DO have a meeting when:

1. You want information or advice from your group.
2. You want to involve your group as a whole.
3. There is an issue that needs to be clarified.
4. You have concerns you want to share with your group as a whole.
5. The group itself wants a meeting.
6. There is a problem that involves people from different groups.
7. There is a problem and it's not clear what it is or who is responsible for dealing with it.

DO NOT have a meeting when:

1. There is inadequate data or poor preparation.
2. Something could be communicated better by telephone, memo or a one-to-one discussion.
3. Your mind is made up, and you have already made your decision.
4. The subject is trivial, or there is too much anger and hostility in the group, and people need to calm down before they can work collaboratively.

AN AGENDA THAT'S WORTH THE PAPER. . . .

An agenda sent to members beforehand makes for a prepared group and a guideline for organization. A standard agenda form assures completeness; anyone could fill it out, and people will know what to expect. Be sure to include:

1. Name of Group
2. Title of Meeting
3. Meeting called by
4. Date, starting time and place
5. Ending time
6. Desired outcomes
7. Background materials
8. Please bring handbooks, agendas, etc.
9. Manager/chairperson, facilitator, recorder and group members
10. Presenters and resource persons
11. Meeting method
12. Special notes
13. Order of agenda items, persons responsible, process and time allocated

ROLES

Roles

ROLES OF PERSONS IN ATTENDANCE

Below are suggested roles necessary in conducting effective meetings. You may want to select from these and adapt them to fit your style.

FACILITATOR:	Neutral servant of the group, does not evaluate or contribute ideas. Helps the group to focus. Is a tool guide, traffic officer and meeting chauffeur.
RECORDER:	Also neutral, nonevaluating. Writes down in front of the group ideas for future reference.
GROUP MEMBER:	Active participant, makes sure neutral roles are maintained. Devotes his /her efforts to the task at hand.
MANAGER/CHAIRPERSON:	Does not run the meeting but becomes an active participant. Makes all final decisions. Power to set constraints and regain control if not satisfied with meeting's progress.

A GOOD FACILITATOR:

Objectives: to get a group to focus on a common problem and process; to protect group members and ensure that everyone participates; to remain neutral and build trust

1. explains the role of the facilitator to the group.

2. explains the difference between content and process, and tells them they must hold their horses until they've agreed on the first item on the agenda and how they are going to deal with it.

3. if no agenda is made, has people call out items they would like to discuss and has the recorder take them down with no discussion or evaluation - makes sure every item is covered.

4. at first, gives as few directions as possible until trust is built.

5. speeds up or slows down the meeting as needed. Asks the group if it is getting anywhere, should a break be taken. Is enthusiastic - alive!

6. talks only when he/she has to and then is short and concise.

7. silences - asks what's going on and waits for an answer. Suggests going on or taking a break only when no one will talk.

8. is positive and encourages people to participate.

9. compliments the group but doesn't lie, is sincere.

10. interrupts the perpetual talker, "Thanks, Bob. Now what do you think, Bill?"

11. intervenes when repetition occurs, gets people off the subject, tactfully.

12. intervenes when someone puts another down.

13. sees himself/herself as others do, practices in front of a mirror or videotape.

FACILITATOR: Objectives: (Continued)

14. when many members want to speak at once, names them in order to speak one at a time.

15. with a problem person, accepts what is being done, acknowledges that it is legitimate, possibly defers acting on it until a later time. Reacts to a problem person, using escalating tactics from subtle to confronting.

A GOOD RECORDER:

1. captures the words of the speaker on large pieces of paper in everyone's full view.

2. speaks to the group when they need to catch up or remember what was said.

3. writes legibly and quickly; understands the technical language used.

4. is not defensive - corrects and modifies as the members say to.

5. doesn't talk or stare at the speaker.

6. captures key ideas in exact words - does not paraphrase or take everything down.

   How to break things up:

   a. Listen for key words.

   b. Try to capture basic ideas, the essence.

   c. Don't write down every word.

   d. Write legibly in big print.

   e. Don't be afraid to misspell.

   f. Abbreviate words.

   g. Circle key ideas, statements or decisions.

   h. Vary colors.

   i. Underline.

   j. Use stars, arrows, numbers, etc.

   k. Number all the sheets.

7. supports the facilitator.

8. uses 24" rolls of white or butcher paper, portable paper cutter, colored marking pens, drafting tape to mount paper to wall. Has paper already up on the wall.

9. transcribes the information into a group memory. Makes a group memo for non-members, similar to minutes.

A GOOD GROUP MEMBER:

1. keeps the facilitator neutral when it is felt he or she is intervening where he/she shouldn't be.
2. keeps an eye on the memory to make sure it is correct and complete.
3. contributes freely
4. listens!!
5. sits in different places to keep things dynamic.
6. is not negative.
7. is not defensive.
8. offers to serve as recorder or facilitator.

A GOOD CHAIRPERSON:

1. sends out an agenda prior to the meeting.
2. plans adequately for space, seating arrangements, audio-visual needs, etc.
3. has good PR skills, encourages attendance and solicits active membership.
4. provides initial leadership and then becomes an active participant at the same level as other members.
5. makes all final decisions.
6. has the power to set constraints and regain control if not satisfied with the meeting's progress.
7. is knowledgeable about resources for use by CAC.

In Summary

EIGHTEEN STEPS TO A BETTER MEETING*

Before the Meeting

1. Plan the meeting carefully: who, what, when, where, why, how many.
2. Prepare and send out an agenda in advance.
3. Come early and set up the meeting room.

At the Beginning of the Meeting

4. Start on time.
5. Get participants to introduce themselves and state their expectations for the meeting.
6. Clearly define roles.
7. Review, revise, and order the agenda.
8. Set clear time limits.
9. Review action items from the previous meeting.

During the Meeting

10. Focus on the same problem, in the same way, at the same time.

At the End of the Meeting

11. Establish action items: who, what, when.
12. Review the group memory.
13. Set the date and place of the next meeting and develop a preliminary agenda.

(continued)

*From "How to Make Meetings Work" by Michael Doyle and David Straus, 1976, Playboy Press, Chicago, IL

At the End of the Meeting (continued)

14. Evaluate the meeting.

15. Close the meeting crisply and positively.

16. Clean up and rearrange the room.

After the Meeting

17. Prepare the group memo.

18. Follow-up on action items and begin to plan the next meeting.

EFFECTIVE PRESENTATIONS

Helpful Hints

As you serve in the role of chairperson of a CAC, you may often find yourself called upon to give presentations at different levels. As you prepare for this type of activity, consider the following points:

- Design your presentation the same way you plan a meeting. Ask what, why, who, when, where, how and how many.
- Who? What do they need to know? Will they understand the jargon? What are their expectations?
- What are your own expectations? Why are you doing this?
- What do you want the results to be? Analyze your needs and adapt the presentation to achieve them.
- Pick out a few key ideas and use the rest of the information for background materials to prevent information overload. Keep handouts short. Hand them out with the agenda after your talk.
- Five to fifteen minutes is the ideal time to keep a person's attention.
- Organize your presentation. Begin with a brief outline of what you will cover. A good format to use is to go through the problem-solving process and involve the group in solving the problem.
- Allow questions before, during and after your presentations. Before questions should only be used if you have experience giving presentations.
- You MUST make your report both verbal and visual; people retain MUCH more that way. Vary your visuals with colors, etc., to keep attention. Adding activity or motion livens up a talk also.

REMEMBER WHEN GIVING A PRESENTATION:

- DON'T READ OR MEMORIZE YOUR MATERIAL
- FACE YOUR AUDIENCE
- UNLESS YOU NEED IT, DON'T USE A TABLE OR PODIUM - IT ADDS DISTANCE
- BE AWARE OF YOUR BODY LANGUAGE
- BE AWARE OF THE BODY LANGUAGE OF YOUR AUDIENCE
- LET PEOPLE KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENING - IF QUESTIONS ARE OK, etc.
- BE HONEST ABOUT YOUR NERVOUSNESS, PRACTICE BEFOREHAND IF NECESSARY

COMMUNICATION

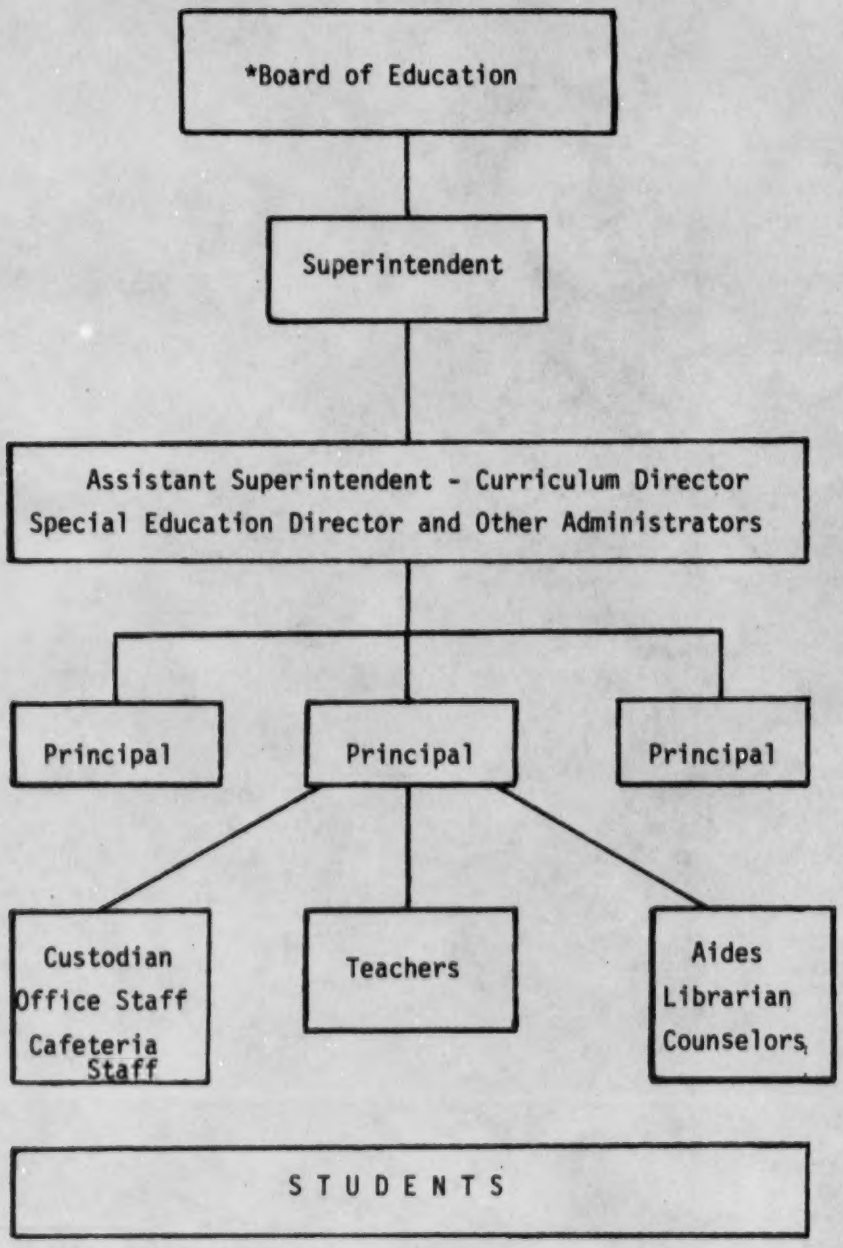
Communication

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

An effective Community Advisory Committee, ideally, chooses receptive, energetic persons as members. Ability to work with a wide variety of parents and professionals is one prerequisite for selection. Another is effective communication skills which are the keys to developing a good working relationship with district staff and parents. Good communication facilitates the CAC becoming an integral part of the local planning area. Communication is so important that it may be considered as a greater prerequisite than extensive knowledge of the legal mandates. Knowledge of legislation will come as a result of working with the leadership in designing the CAC.

The CAC membership must communicate effectively with the school district and the community as well. You will find it helpful to understand the administrative hierarchy, source of information and the overall operation of the local school district or consortium. Included on the following page is an example of a chart which would be useful in developing a communications tree for your district or Special Education Local Plan Agency. Add or delete boxes as necessary.

SCHOOL DISTRICT ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE



*Elected or Appointed

As CAC Chairperson it will be your responsibility to get the message of the committee out to the public. The most effective delivery systems are the local newspapers and radio and TV stations. Included below are suggested do's and don'ts which enhance effective media relations. Additional information of this type is available to you from your SERN center.

Some Suggestions for Effective Media Relations

DO'S:

* Take time to get to know editors, news directors, and reporters personally, to know their needs, their audiences and the form in which they like materials presented. Give them sincere, interested, helpful service.

* Let newspapers, TV stations and radio stations know when you like their presentations. Express your approval to the reporter and to his/her editor, either by letter or by phone. A personal visit won't hurt.

* Be accessible to reporters and their editors. Take time to answer all questions thoroughly and carefully. If research is needed, tell the reporter you will get the information or will assist him in conducting the research.

* Respect the language. Write news releases, speeches and other materials going to parents and the community in "living English" without jargon or acronyms. Omit "educationese" when talking to the public and reporters.

* Keep up with staff changes in your local media. Ask the editor or news director which reporter to contact about school stories.

* Ask editors and news directors what their deadlines are and make sure your copy is on time. (The earlier the better.)

* After an interview, offer to answer any questions the reporter may have later. Give him/her your home phone number as well as your office number.

* Develop your "news sense" and look for interesting stories. Watch your local media and see what types of stories they like.

* In a telephone interview, stick to information you know. If you don't have an answer to an inquiry or if you need a few minutes to collect your thoughts, promise to call the reporter back in time to meet his or her deadline, if possible. Keep your promises.

DO's continued

* Make reporters comfortable at committee meetings. Remember he or she is the eyes and ears of thousands of citizens. Place the press table where reporters can see and hear board members, staff, and persons speaking from the audience. Have name plates for each committee member -- prevent spelling and identification errors.

* If a reporter makes a serious error in fact or interpretation, contact him/her and politely point out the mistake. But don't call over petty mistakes. Approach the editor or news director only if the problem continues and you believe the reporter is biased.

* Make a practice of building good relations with editors by sending them background material. Although this may have nd immediate story value, it helps alert editors to future stories. Be sure to mark the material as "background information."

* Remember that the media can and should be your friend and ally, not always your enemy, adversary, or critic. Be frank, honest, objective, and fearless. Level with your reporter your concerns and ask for his or her cooperation.

* * *

REMEMBER: Good public relations are not based upon what you say... but upon what you do.

* * *

DON'TS

* Don't try to "hide" problems. Professional reporters are trained to sniff out problems. Admit a problem exists and outline steps being taken to solve it.

* Never ask to review an article before it goes to press. To do this is to question the reporter's professional ability and integrity.

* Don't ask an editor to send you a copy of a story. Ask a member of your staff to clip it. Remember that editors are busy people, too.

Claude W. Richardson
Kern County Superintendent of Schools
Public Information Office

COMMUNICATION TIPS

1. Seek to clarify your ideas before communicating.

   The more systematically we analyze the problem or idea to be communicated, the clearer it becomes. Good planning must consider the goals and attitudes of those who will receive the communication and those who will be affected by it.

2. Examine the true purpose of each communication.

   Before you communicate, ask yourself what you really want to accomplish with your message--obtain information, initiate action, change another person's attitude? Identify your most important goal and then adapt your language, tone, and total approach to serve that specific objective. Don't try to accomplish too much with each communication. The sharper the focus of your message the greater its chances of success.

3. Consider the total physical and human setting whenever you communicate.

   Be constantly aware of the total setting in which you communicate; the physical setting, the audience, etc. Like all living things, communication must be capable of adapting to its environment.

4. Be mindful, while you communicate, of the overtones as well as the basic content of your message.

   Your tone of voice, your expression, your apparent receptiveness to the responses of others--all have tremendous impact on those you wish to reach.

5. Last, but by no means least: Speak not only to be understood but to understand--be a good listener.

   When we start talking we often cease to listen--in that larger sense of being attuned to the other person's unspoken reactions and attitudes. Even more serious is the fact that we are all guilty, at times, of inattentiveness when others are attempting to communicate to us. Listening is one of the most important, most difficult--and most neglected--skills in communication. It demands that we concentrate not only on the explicit meanings another person is expressing, but on the implicit meanings, unspoken words, and undertones that may be far more significant. Thus we must learn to listen with the inner ear if we are to know the inner person.

COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES

As chairperson or leader of parent groups, you may wish to use inclusion activities directed toward opening channels of communication. Included in the following section is a collection of activities which are useful as catalysts for enhancing group communication and participation. In the event you do use this type of activity allow time before the activity for presenting the rationale and purpose and debriefing or discussion after the activity is completed.

As chairperson, leader or facilitator you must:

- remain in control of the activity
- encourage interaction
- avoid having a few participants dominate the group
- facilitate the activity becoming a creative learning experience

COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES

COMMUNICATE: Everyone is saying it, wanting it. Communication is the backbone to any type of relationship, and yet, we seem to have great difficulty in achieving it. Effective communication can be divided into three categories: listening, expression and acceptance. How well we are able to listen, express and accept will determine how effectively we communicate.

LISTENING:

- An open mind is imperative.
- Hear all that is said, making no judgments- "Shutting out" will destroy all attempts to communicate.
- Put aside all preconceived ideas for the time being.

EXPRESSING:

- Be willing to take risks. Express all thoughts and feelings. Put aside prejudices and dispense with destructive elements such as anger and fear.

ACCEPTANCE:

- Accept what is said as valid, true feelings.

We can test our communication skills by answering some simple questions.

- Were you able to "walk in the other person's shoes?"
- Did you come away with new ideas?
- Did the interaction leave you feeling satisfied?

If you were able to answer yes to these three questions, you're on your way to exhibiting good communication skills.

As Parent Specialists, we see a need for improved communication between parents and professionals. Our task through SERN is to provide workshops for parent groups in our area to improve their communication skills. They must feel confident with themselves to provide the type of support their children need. When educators are able to communicate openly with parents, they will discover more successful children in their classrooms and a strong ally in the family.

By
Sandi Ryder
Parent Specialist SERN 7

SUMMARY

SUMMARY STATEMENTS

- CAC members must be able to look beyond their own personal needs. They should be concerned with the welfare of all children served by special education.
- Avoid beginning with an unmanageable number of people, otherwise confusion may short circuit the meeting.
- Allow a short time to air any lingering effects from bad experiences, and remove any remaining "chips on shoulders."
- Be sure that the CAC has some designated responsibilities, goals or projects. In the stages of early organization, the administration may be able to suggest some worthwhile projects.
- Although the CAC is a supportive group for parents, stay away from providing direct parent support such as attending IEP meetings, etc. As the group grows, that may be a function of one of the subcommittees.
- As members are recruited, be certain to provide adequate orientation. Notebooks should be provided which contain all of the information needed for reference to fill specific roles.
- Be sure that all members understand that the CAC is not simply a forum to air grievances.
- Be aware of the available resources, and make use of them.
- Encourage district representation at all CAC meetings.
- Establish open and frequent appointments between the administrator and CAC chairperson.
- Be aware of what interests and concerns the community has and direct some effort toward these areas.
- Don't overwhelm potential members with too much information. Some persons may feel intimidated.

- When developing the agenda, always allow some time for add-ons. (Provide training in agenda validation. Request from SERN.)

- Within the structure of the group, set up subcommittees which can zero in on specific tasks, i.e., parent education, membership, research and evaluation. From time to time there may be a need to set up ad hoc committees which will be short lived, i.e., report card committee, criteria committee.

- During the first year, the group may want to limit their functions. A good start is to develop bylaws, a parent handbook, procedures for communicating with others, and recruiting of new members.

RESOURCES

SERN

The Special Education Resource Network is a project funded by the Office of Special Education, Personnel Development Unit, California State Department of Education. The primary purpose of this Network is the provision of inservice training and technical assistance in special education personnel development to any agency serving individuals with exceptional needs. The Network is composed of nine regional units, each serving a defined geographical area and five special training centers.

REGION 1

Suzi Durkin, Coordinator
San Diego County Department of Education
6401 Linda Vista Road
San Diego, CA 92111
(714)292-3616

REGION 2

Gwen Johnson, Coordinator
Redlands Unified School District
30800 Palo Alto Drive
Redlands, CA 92373
(714)794-2138

REGION 3

Gil Salka, Coordinator
Santa Monica-Malibu Unified
2526 6th Street
Santa Monica, CA 90405
(213)392-8491

REGION 4

Anne Langstaff Pasanella, Coordinator
Santa Barbara County Schools--Hope School Center
3970 La Colina Road
Santa Barbara, CA 93110
(805)964-4711

REGION 5

Anne Seasons, Coordinator
Alameda County Office of Education
685 A Street
Hayward, CA 94541
(415)881-6602

REGION 6

Jill Rivers, Coordinator
Fresno Unifed School District
4839 E. Kings Canyon
Fresno, CA 93721
(209)251-7376

REGION 7

Lorna Ross, Coordinator
650 University Avenue #201
Sacramento, CA 95825
(916)921-0515

REGION 8

Diane Scott, Coordinator
Mendocino County Schools
589 Low Gap Road
Ukiah, CA 95482
(707)468-9189

REGION 9

Tom Neely, Coordinator
Tehama County Schools
P. O. Box 810
Red Bluff, CA 96080
(916)527-5811

SPECIAL CENTERS

ASSESSMENT TRAINING CENTER
Judy Quan, Coordinator
Alameda County Office of Education
685 A Street
Hayward, CA 94541
(415)881-6214

INFANT/PRESCHOOL TRAINING CENTER
Linda Brekken, Coordinator
650 University Avenue #201
Sacramento, CA 95825
(916)921-0531

PARENT TECH CENTER
Heather M. Kaney, Coordinator
Alameda County Office of Education
685 A Street
Hayward, CA 94541
(415)881-6338

RESOURCE SERVICE CENTER
Steve Johnson, Coordinator
650 University Avenue #201
Sacramento, CA 95825
(916)921-0521

TRAINING & RESOURCE GROUP
Anne TeSelle, Coordinator
Alameda County Office of Education
685 A Street
Hayward, CA 94541
(415)881-6625

Providing services for parents of handicapped children is a priority of the Network. Parents of handicapped children serve on the staff as specialists, adding their personal experiences to bring together parents, schools and the community in achieving their common goal: to provide an appropriate education for every child and especially the handicapped child.

The following services and/or materials may be available to you through your regional SERN office:

Assistance in planning meetings, inservices and other CAC activities

Materials, films, consultant services

Samples of CAC bylaws

Samples of CAC parent handbooks

Reading lists

Sample meeting agendas

Handbook on Planning Workshops

Legislative Fact Sheets

Publicity Tips

Additional materials, including Vol.II, are also available through your regional SERN Center or:

SERN Resource Service Center
650 University Ave. #201
Sacramento, CA 95825
(916)921-0521

ACTIVITIES

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GETTING ACQUAINTED: A POTPOURRI

Below are listed several structured experiences that can be used as icebreakers, in human relations training events. These getting-acquainted ideas can be employed in laboratories, conferences, class meetings, and other group meetings.

1. Superlatives. Participants are asked to study the composition of the group quietly and to decide on a superlative adjective that describes themselves in reference to the others. (Example: youngest, tallest, most up-tight). Then they tell their adjectives, explain, and test the accuracy of their self-perceptions.

2. Hometown. Secure a large blank map from a school supplies dealer. Post the map and have each participant write his first name and hometown in the proper place on the map. (As he tells about his hometown, he is disclosing important things about himself).

3. Demographics. On a chalkboard, the group lists all of the background data that they would be interested in knowing about each other, such as: age, marital status, educational history, etc. Participants in turn tell who they are in reference to these demographic questions.

4. Progressive Inference. Post sheets of newsprint on the walls, one for each participant. Group members - write their first names on the sheets and then begin four rounds of self-disclosure. First, each writes his favorite English letter (A,B,C, etc.) on his sheet, returns to his seat, explains his choice, and is questioned by his fellow participants. In rounds two-four, the content is his favorite word, then his favorite phrase, and finally his favorite sentence. (Chip R. Bell, North Carolina National Bank, Charlotte).

5. Draw a Classroom. Participants are given paper and pencils and are instructed to draw a classroom. They have five to ten minutes to work privately in this phase. After everyone finishes, they hold their drawings in front of them and circulate around the room without speaking (ten minutes). Then they are asked to return to two or three interesting people to talk with them. Subgroups are formed to discuss the content of the drawings and to report to the total group. (Variations: draw an office or a shop). (Robert T. Williams, Colorado State University, Fort Collins).

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6. Get Acquainted. Participants are instructed to conduct a people hunt using questions or statements similar to those on the attached sheet. Upon completion of the people hunt the group comes together for a brief period to share the experience.

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PEOPLE HUNT

Get a different signature for each item. Happy hunting!

1. A PERSON WHO TEACHES THE SAME GRADE LEVEL(S) AS YOU TEACH.

   _____

2. A PERSON WHO HAS TAUGHT THE SAME NUMBER OF YEARS.

   _____

3. A PERSON WHO IS A PARENT.

   _____

4. A PERSON WHO GRADUATED FROM THE SAME UNIVERSITY.

   _____

5. A PERSON WHO LIKES TO PEEL ORANGES.

   _____

6. A PERSON WHO WAS BORN IN THE SAME ASTROLOGICAL SIGN AS YOU.

   _____

7. A PERSON WHO TRAVELED OUT OF THE COUNTRY LAST SUMMER.

   _____

8. A PERSON WHO CAN SPEAK TWO LANGUAGES.

   _____

9. A PERSON WHO WOKE UP FEELING GOOD THIS MORNING.

   _____

10. A PERSON WHO WAS BORN IN THE SAME STATE.

    _____

11. A PERSON WHO CAN TOUCH THEIR NOSE WITH THEIR TONGUE.

    _____

12. A PERSON WHO HAS THE SAME RECREATIONAL INTEREST/PURSUIT AS YOU.

    _____

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"WHO AM I?" VARIATIONS: A GETTING-ACQUAINTED ACTIVITY

Goal

To allow participants to become acquainted quickly in a relatively non-threatening way. (These variations may be especially appropriate for participants who have difficulty writing about themselves.)

Group Size

Unlimited

Time Required

Approximately forty-five minutes

Materials

1. Sheets of paper, 12" x 20", one to be fastened around each participants neck "bib-style," with a string.
2. Ball of string and scissors.
3. Pencils or felt-tipped markers.

Physical Setting

Large room in which participants may move freely.

Process

I. Participants receive the materials and are allowed ten minutes for any of the following activities to introduce themselves to fellow participants. The facilitator may choose one variation for all participants or allow participants to choose any variations they wish.

   1. Participants may draw a picture or pictures of themselves: a caricature, a cartoon strip, etc.
   2. Participants may draw a pie with different-sized wedges to illustrate percentages of themselves devoted to certain life focuses--for example, a love-distribution pie or an energy pie.
   3. Participants may draw a "life-line" - a graph of their lives to the present, showing high points--or a projected total life line which indicates where they are now.
   4. Participants may write a series of words, such as adjectives. Words might be selected through free association.

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5. *Specialty groups, such as musicians, math engineers, or chemists, may identify themselves with their own symbols.*

6. *Participants may draw pictures of animals, objects, or music with which they identify.*

7. *Participants may write words to indicate their own values.*

II. *Each participant ties his completed sheet around his neck.*

III. *Participants circulate in cocktail-party fashion, but without speaking. (Background music is optional).*

IV. *The facilitator asks participants to move on to a new person every minute for a total of ten to fifteen "meetings".*

V. *After this nonverbal phase, the participants are told to return to two or three people they thought would be interesting, based on their previous encounters. They may now speak to one another. They may be encouraged to ask questions they ordinarily would not ask.*

Variations

I. *Instead of the question "Who am I?", participants can complete the open-ended statement "I am becoming the kind of person who..." or the sentence "I am pretending that..." (It is important that at least ten different responses be called for, so that participants move beyond superficial self-disclosure).*

II. *Participants may be asked to avoid giving demographic data in their answers. The facilitator may illustrate by pointing out the difference between "What am I?" (husband, father, counselor, etc.) and "Who am I?" (tense, a taker of risks, managing myself toward openness, etc.).*

III. *Self-descriptive adjectives can be called for instead of answers to the question. A second column of adjectives could be in response to the question "How would I like to be?"*

IV. *Participants may be permitted to speak in Process step III.*

V. *After the processing, participants can post their sheets on the wall, so that all the getting-acquainted data are available for study at all times. Persons may edit their sheets at any time during the training event.*

VI. *As a closure activity, participants may be instructed to write what they learned during the training. The content may be varied. For example, in a personal growth laboratory the topic could be "What I learned about me": in a leadership/management development laboratory, the topic could simply be "What I learned" or "What I am going to do differently."*

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GROUP CONVERSATION: DISCUSSION-STARTERS

Goals

To develop a compatible climate and readiness for interaction in a group through sharing personal experience.

Group Size

Up to thirty members. (Small groups tend to be more intense, but the activity can be carried out effectively in moderately large groups).

Time Required

Group Conversation can be a fifteen-minute preface to other group activities, or it may be planned for an entire evening or for several meetings, depending on the goals of the group.

Materials

Copies of the Group Conversation Starters Sheet for all participants.

Physical Setting

Group members sit in a circle.

Process

The facilitator must be able to provide a comfortable balance between autocratic and democratic leadership if the group is to function well. This means that he must be prepared to redirect the group toward personal feelings and experiences if the conversation shifts to intellectualizing; it also means that he must intervene tactfully if one member is taking up more than his share of time.

I. The facilitator explains that the participants will share experiences rather than opinions. Group Conversation is person-and-feeling centered and is not to be confused with group discussion, which is problem-and-intellect centered. He may also point out that when a group exchanges personally meaningful experiences, a warmth and closeness usually develops.

II. The facilitator distributes the Group Conversation Starters Sheet.

III. Participants volunteer subjects about which they are willing to converse.

IV. The facilitator encourages group members to begin the conversation with descriptions of childhood experiences which illustrate their feelings and attitudes toward the subject. The facilitator may need to ask questions to help group members describe their experiences. As the conversation progresses, the facilitator allows it to move into post-childhood experiences and the present. The participants should see the progression of certain ideas or themes.

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V. *The facilitator leads a brief discussion of the experience.*

Variations

I. *Instead of distributing the Group Conversation Starters Sheet, the facilitator can have the only copy and call out the subjects to be used one at a time.*

II. *To make the Starters Sheet more appropriate to a particular group, it can be edited, expanded, or generated within a group session.*

III. *One Starters Sheet can be passed around the group, and each member can select the next subject to be discussed.*

IV. *The Starters Sheet can be posted on newsprint.*

V. *Participants can be paired to interview each other on significant subjects from the Starters Sheet. After about twenty minutes, the group reconvenes, and each person reports what his partner said.*

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GROUP CONVERSATION STARTERS SHEET

1. Other people usually....
2. The best measure of personal success is....
3. Anybody will work hard if....
4. People think of me as....
5. When I let go....
6. Marriage can be....
7. Nothing is so frustrating as....
8. People who run things should be....
9. I miss....
10. The thing I like about myself is....
11. There are times when I....
12. I would like to be....
13. When I have something to say....
14. As a child I....
15. The teacher I liked best was a person who....
16. It is fun to....
17. My body is....
18. When it comes to women....
19. Loving someone....
20. Ten years from now, I....

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